

DEMOCRACY AND ETHICS

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India is a democratic country; and by that we mean it is governed by us, its people [“democracy”, from the Greek *democratia*: *demos*, people, and *kratia*, government or rule]. Ethics refers to the study of moral conduct, of “what one ought to do”.

Our nation recognizes the ideals of Justice, liberty, Equality, and Fraternity in its constitution. With the complexity of religious beliefs, its diversities, secularistic views, and the influence of the media ethical decisions are becoming more and more difficult in our society. The film producer defends his stance of overloading his film with sex as right, while a religious or even a secular man opposes it as morally depraving and detrimental to society. The advertisement agencies technically propagate lies deluding people to believe something which is not true. Our nation has found itself in a closet of ethical relativism – subjectivism and conventionalism. Variant religions assume their own moral standards. The Western culture is having a profound influence in our society, especially through the media (TV, Cinema, Song Albums, Novels, Journals, etc.). In such a context of diversity, and complexity, what kind of ethical standard should we, as citizens of democratic

India, adopt form making ethical decisions?
Following are some options:

1. Ethical Egoism (from the Greek *ego*, I). It is a consequentialist ethical theory ("the end justifies the means") which asserts that "right" is what is beneficial in the end to the individual ("to me"). Two of its forms are: **Hedonism**, according to which pleasure is the ultimate good; and **Self-realization**, according to which knowledge, power, or rational self-interest, and the promotion of all one's capacities is the ultimate good. Its method of justification is self-interest.

This theory, of course, poses a number of problems. There is the issue of conflicting interests, the danger of self-benefit at the expense of others; and in a democratic country like ours, it cannot be the ultimate standard of ethical decisions.

2. Utilitarianism: This also is a consequentialist theory that asserts that "right" is what produces the greatest quantity of happiness or pleasure. Its two forms are: **Act Utilitarianism**, the morality of an action is determined by the quantity of happiness it produces for the most people; **Rule Utilitarianism**, our actions should be governed by such a rule that produces the greatest happiness for the most people. Its method of justification is empirical evidence.

The problem of this theory mainly consists in the problem of knowledge. How do I know that my action have produced the greatest happiness for the most people? How can I trust the authenticity of the consequences? What about the minority? Is what is happiness to me, or in my sight, happiness to everybody else?

3. Altruism: (from the Italian *altrui*, "someone else). This is the theory of self-sacrifice, of concern for the welfare of others, and as such is opposed to egoism. It is the attitude of selflessness. It is doubtful if this theory is applicable to the majority: for a person cannot be selfless unless this position and attitude produces in him a greater satisfaction and happiness.

Now, which of the above criteria is applicable in a democratic society? It is my opinion that none of them as a solitude can be applied. A person should consider egoism (not total egoism) for self-development, utilitarianism for society's benefit and happiness, and altruism that he may not become overly self-interested but will have concern for the welfare of others as well. The blending of these three together will produce an ethical standard applicable in a democratic society; a democratic ethic, which has respect for the ideals, aspirations, and talents of others.